

**Amendments to the Specification:**

Please replace the paragraph starting on p. 4, line 9, with the following replacement paragraph:

According to another embodiment of the present invention, a communication link protocol is provided for communicating between nodes of an interconnect system via a communication link. The communication link protocol includes a built in self test (BIST) communication issued from a local node to a remote node for testing hardware at the remote node via the communication link. A link watchdog communication issued from the local node to the remote node for testing hardware software at the remote node via the communication link.

Please replace the paragraph starting on p. 20, line 8, with the following replacement paragraph:

Furthermore, if nodes 14 are implemented as system boards coupled to a backplane connector, [[A]] a backplane connector differs from a general network connection in which packets of data/information are generally expected to be lost during "normal" operation, thus requiring a significant amount of protocol complexity (e.g., retransmission and complex error-handling procedures). In a backplane connector, the probability of single-bit errors is very small, thus allowing for utilization of an error correcting code (ECC) which is relatively simple. This ECC can be similar to that in utilized in memory systems. More serious errors are not expected during "normal" operation of a backplane connector, and thus, only need to be addressed generally if a system has failed or is broken.